

How Does Science Fiction Influence the Real World?

The Moderator - January 19, 2019



Warmer questions

1. Have you seen any sci-fi films or tv shows? What are your favourite ones and why?
2. Can you describe any futuristic technology that you've seen in these shows? Are they realistic? Could they become reality one day?
3. Do you feel that modern technology, like being able to have video calls with multiple people from around the world, access to the world's knowledge, and high-density storage is amazing?
4. Is it fair to say that modern technology would seem like magic to people from 200 years ago?



Reading section

The technology of tomorrow

Science fiction literature has affected society significantly. It has inspired many to pursue careers in science which has, in turn, resulted in advancements in technology such as the developments in cloning, rockets, artificial intelligence, satellites, wireless internet, etc.

The creations of writers are used to inspire the coming generations of the limitless possibilities of the future, resulting in the progression of science fiction becoming a reality. It is highly common for literature to inspire minds to create the impossible. This is how the first mobile phone was developed. In 1973 Martin Cooper stated that his inspiration for creating the world's first portable phone was indeed the 'communicator device' used in the Star Trek episodes in 1966.

A problem that has emerged from the science fiction genre is that it never puts our dependence on technology in a positive light. Many writers use this to presage the future and the unfavourable effects of our dependence on technology. The classics such as *The Giver*, 1984, *Brave New World* and *The War of the Worlds* explore the possible horrors arising from society's dependence on technology.

In a dystopian interpretation of the future, Sci-Fi writers are fixated on the negative effects to innovative thinking. Yet, science fiction is indeed valuable and innovative towards society. For example, Google Earth was directly inspired by an idea from *Snow Crash*. The words "robot" and "robotics", "cyberspace", "zero gravity", "gas giant", "avatar" (in the sense of a virtual identity) "atomic bomb", "genetic engineering" and "computer virus" were all coined by science fiction writers.

Questions which arise from this:

1. The Chinese government, which banned science fiction during the Cultural Revolution, is now very enthusiastic about science fiction. Is it because reading science fiction encourages young people to learn about science?
2. Can we include the best science fiction works along with other canonical literary works? Or is science fiction a second-rate literary genre?
3. What is the line that differentiates the science fiction genre from other literary genres such as speculative fiction or fantasy?
4. Successful Sci-Fi works are typically entertaining. Is science fiction merely "entertainment" or is it also "literature"?



Vocabulary matching

Match the vocab on the left with the correct definitions on the right.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. Sci-Fi | a. a future society which is damaged by a bad government, authoritarianism, or environmental degradation |
| 2. Cult classic | b. based on imagined future scientific advances |
| 3. Dilemma | c. too many people |
| 4. Pose (verb) | d. a movie or book, which is popular or fashionable among a particular group or section of society |
| 5. Dystopian | e. a product made from used chemicals and not natural |
| 6. Synthetic | f. a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made |
| 7. Overpopulation | g. a present danger or problem |
| 8. Sprawling | h. an area where people live in poverty and have few amenities. Homes are often very simple and do not have electricity. |
| 9. Slum-like | i. to spread in an uncontrolled way |
| | j. not physically existing as such but made by software to appear to do so |

Video: How does science fiction influence the real world?

1. Who is Martin Cooper?
2. What did Martin use as an inspiration to invent the mobile phone?
3. What is Alexa based on?
4. What objects became facts after appearing in science fiction?
5. What does Sci-Fi provide?
6. Who is Paul McAuley?
7. What is Ridley Scott's 1982 cult classic Blade Runner about?
8. What is Secret Cinema?
9. What does Steven Spielberg's movie Ready Player One explore?
10. Who is Syd Mead?

Pros of science fiction

1. No limits. There is nothing that cannot be expressed in a science-fiction story. All boundaries of common sense and contemporary possibility can be overcome.
2. Vision. Science-fiction often precedes science. Science-fiction contributes to humanity's inspiration pool when it comes down to gadgets or foreseeing scientific discoveries.



3. Adventure. Science-fiction offers a world full of information and entertainment. Fun typical aspects such as: robots, androids, cyborgs, interstellar flight, exploration of other planets and galaxies, discovery of the universe, super-powers, shiny guns, time-machines, exotic locations, incredible gadgets, faster than light travel, nanotechnology, extreme medicine, biotechnology, and immortality are among the most significant traits of Sci-Fi.
4. Human's humanity. Sci-fi explores the dark aspects of the human psyche without having to resort to overused contexts. Sci-Fi's depiction of non-human or semi-human characters challenges what we mean by "human".

Cons of science fiction

1. Inconsistency: Fantasy elements must be internally coherent. Also, a good story can be easily spoiled by an inconsistent fantasy element.
2. Research. All genres require research, but historical fiction and science-fiction need it the most. There's no space for flagrant errors. Extensive research and expert consultancy are a must.
3. Repetitiveness. A lot of Sci-Fi novels blend together (hard to make something different). When fantasy is married to another genre, such as science fiction or history, sometimes it is hard to keep it convincing in the context of the other genre.
4. Complexity: Sci-Fi elements require serious treatment to make fantasy elements sound plausible and convincing.

Potential debating topics

1. The use of science fiction films is successful in stimulating student curiosity in science.
2. Science fiction can have an undesirable effect on the students' understanding of science.
3. Visual media is an important and effective way in which scientific ideas are passed on to the general public.
4. Films and television blur the line between fact and fiction. This has corroded the public's critical thinking skills.

Conclusion

In science fiction literature, we typically find that humanity is spread out across the solar system and galaxy, using technology that is not possible according to the rules of physics -as we understand it today. Looking beyond the robots, mutants, and spaceships in science fiction is really important, though. Good Sci-Fi stories are all really about people more than it is about science innovations. Well-written science fiction prompts readers to truly ask themselves: What does it mean to be human?



Link to the video

<https://www.esldebates.com/how-does-science-fiction-influence-the-real-world/>

Vocabulary KEYS

1. b
2. d
3. f
4. g
5. a
6. e
7. c
8. i
9. h
10. j

Video comprehension answers

1. He is the man who invented the mobile phone.
2. Star Trek show was the inspiration for his idea.
3. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos based Alexa, the voice-activated speaker, on Star Trek's talking computer.
4. Submarines, helicopters, rockets, and touch screens appeared in science fiction before becoming science facts.
5. Sci-Fi inspires real-world technology. It also provides a way to explore the moral dilemmas that advanced technologies could pose.
6. He is a scientist who became a science fiction writer.
7. The film is set in a dystopian future where synthetic human workers are bioengineered by corporate power.
8. It is a multi-layered physical experience where physical sets are inspired by a film. So instead of just watching a film, you literally buy tickets to become a character and part of an interactive theatrical experience.
9. Steven Spielberg's latest movie Ready Player One explores another emerging technology, virtual reality. The film imagines a future where overpopulation, pollution and climate change have forced for most people to live in sprawling, slum-like cities. Young people escape their desolation by living much of their lives in virtual reality.
10. He designed the look of some of Hollywood's most seminal Sci-Fi films including Blade Runner, Star Trek the Motion Picture, and Aliens. In the real world, he's designed cars for Ford and electronics for Phillips.

